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THE Gauteng government does not know where nearly 20 000 of its buildings are.

The province's department of infrastructure development has been given a tongue-lashing in a quarterly oversight report because it could account for only 9 800 of the 29 000 properties under its supervision. The department is responsible for constructing and maintaining government buildings.

The department is already racing against the clock to clean up a massive backlog of dodgy leases held by businesses and government officials.

Yesterday, Thulasizwe Simelane, the department's spokesman, acknowledged the mess and said an experienced company was being appointed to help the department.

The report, compiled by infrastructure development portfolio committee chairman Joggie Boers, blasted the department's inability to fix its asset register, despite previously appointing consultants to help it to do so.

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can assist in terms of [verifying] public property."

In one of several examples last year, The Star reported that the department's property portfolio was in such a mess it had bought a R12-million building in the Johannesburg CBD next to ANC headquarters, Luthuli House, and demolished it, leaving the empty piece of land for the ruling party to use as parking.

The infrastructure department said at the time it was not aware the ANC was using the property illegally.

Yesterday, Boers said the mess could be just the tip of the iceberg.

"I think there is more. We have not scratched the surface of this thing.

"They indicated [to us] that they are now going to [approach] the CSIR [the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research] to help them," he said.

The committee had even tried turning to the department of public works for help,

Gauteng is unable to list properties it owns

but in vain, said Boers. "That's a problem. It is the taxpayers' money we are playing with here. We cannot charge market-related rent if we don't know where our buildings are [or] what the state of our buildings is."

Simelane said yesterday the register of assets had become the department's top priority because it had been flagged also by the auditor-general's office in its 2012/13 financial assessment.

He said the deeds office had told the provincial government it owned 24 000 properties, of which 9 804 could be verified as its

assets. A further 7 000 properties were transferred to Gauteng from national government.

The numbers provided by Simelane differ from those of the portfolio committee.

Simelane said the department was identifying a service provider, with a credible track record, to compile a comprehensive and accurate asset register. The process was at the evaluation stage after the call for proposals closed on Friday.